

Workers Struggles: Europe, Middle East & Africa

23 September 2011

Greek anti-austerity strikes planned for October

The main private sector union GSEE and the Adedy public sector union federation have announced a general strike on October 19 and a nationwide civil service strike on October 5.

The troika of the European Union, European Central Bank and International Monetary Fund, acting on behalf of the international banks, are demanding a new round of austerity measures against the Greek working class as the precondition for releasing the next instalment of bailout funds, without which Greece will go bankrupt next month.

Last weekend, European finance ministers refused to approve the disbursement of €8 billion because Greece, whose economy has collapsed as a result of the mass layoffs and social cuts already imposed, has failed to meet its “deficit-reduction targets”.

The Greek official jobless rate has almost doubled since 2008 to reach 16 percent—the real unemployment rate is closer to 30 percent. The troika is demanding more drastic cuts in public sector jobs and wages, the wholesale closure of state agencies, and the immediate privatization and sale of state enterprises.

Spanish teachers stage strike over jobs

Teachers in Madrid took a second day of industrial action over staff cuts, reported AP. Colleagues of the teachers in the northwestern region of Galicia joined them. Virginia Fernandez of the UGT union said about 80 percent of teachers were staying away from classrooms.

The budget cuts are part of an austerity package being implemented by the government to force the burden of the economic crisis onto the backs of workers.

In the education department, the Madrid authorities hope to save €80 million (\$110 million) with staffing cuts. Tens of thousands of teachers, parents and students marched through Madrid on Tuesday. AP said some carried banners calling public education an investment rather than an expense. Others had placards with a picture of the regional president, Esperanza Aguirre, and the phrase, “Wanted, for robbing public education”.

Air Europa pilots begin strike in Spain

Pilots at Air Europa are to begin a strike this week and will take action

every Monday and Thursday indefinitely to protest against the airline offering joint services with airline Orbest.

Ireland: Hundreds protest over SNA cuts

On September 14, 300 parents, teachers, children and supporters marched from the Central Bank in Dublin to the gates of Dáil Éireann to demonstrate against the cuts to the number of special needs assistants (SNAs) and resource teachers' hours.

A similar protest took place at Dáil Éireann in July.

Many of those on the march expressed frustration that no progress had been made since the last demonstration.

Speaking to the *Irish Times*, Seán Breen, whose six-year-old autistic son Tadhg attends St. Senan's Primary School in Enniscorthy, Co Wexford, said, “His problems would be that he has very poor concentration. With a one to one they are able to keep him to his work desk—now he has to share an SNA, so if the SNA is trying to work with the other child he is just going to disrupt the class.”

Joan Laverty, a former special needs assistant in Griffin Valley Educate Together School, who has been made unemployed because of the cuts, criticised the government for its position on shared access. “Unless Ruairí (Quinn) has come up with some new directive to train an SNA to miraculously manifest themselves in two places at once, the option of access is a farce.”

Martin Collins of Pavee Point said travellers had been hit particularly hard by the cuts, which removed all of their support systems. “From beginning of this term, all of the resource teachers for travellers have been discontinued which number approximately 600 plus 42 visiting teacher posts; they too have been discontinued.

“These measures will have a devastating effect on travellers' participation and attainment levels in the mainstream education and our life chances are very poor as it is.”

Irish nurses to stage work stoppage over safety risks

The *Irish Times* reported this week that nurses at the emergency department at the Mid-Western Regional Hospital in Limerick are to stage a four-hour work stoppage next Wednesday in protest at “appalling conditions for patients and the clinical safety risks”.

UK teachers to ballot on strike over conditions, pay and jobs

Almost a quarter of a million serving teachers are to be balloted for industrial strike action to challenge excessive workloads and attacks on working conditions, pay, pensions and jobs.

According to its web site, the National Executive of the National Association of Schoolmasters/Union of Women Teachers (NASUWT), one of the two main teachers’ unions, agreed unanimously September 11 to begin preparations for balloting members in England and Wales for national industrial action.

This will be the first time in over a decade that the union has balloted for national action.

In a recent survey, 97 percent of teachers said they had no confidence that the coalition government’s education policies would improve education.

UK oil refinery construction workers protest

Around 100 construction workers are to demonstrate outside the Lindsey Oil Refinery in North Lincolnshire on September 26 to oppose plans to impose up to 30 percent pay cuts due to employers tearing up national agreements.

According to the Unite union, eight companies have broken with the national agreements and at five of these workers have received letters demanding they either sign new contracts on lower pay and conditions, or face the sack.

Egyptian bus workers strike

Bus drivers in the capital, Cairo, escalated a three-day-old strike for better wages and services for the public, according to *Ahram Online*.

Ahram Online reporters were among journalists and photographers at El-Teraa garage whom the Transport Authority police barred from entering depots in order to talk to striking drivers.

“Forty thousand public transport drivers and ticket conductors started their strike action on Sunday by shutting down one garage in Cairo, and threatened to spread the work stoppage to the entire city if the Transport Authority did not meet their wage demands.

“Drivers are calling for pay raises and other financial incentives in order to reach LE1200 per month, which is considered by most economists to be the minimum salary necessary for basic survival in Egypt”, it said.

Workers at Olympic Group subsidiary strike

Workers employed by the appliances giant Ideal—the Egyptian

subsidiary of the appliance manufacturer Olympic Group—have begun an open-ended strike to protest not receiving their promised share of the company’s sale deal to Swedish firm Electrolux.

Workers say that the prime minister promised them 1 percent of the LE2.4 billion (\$429 million) deal, which amounts to around LE3,500 per worker.

Israeli rail workers declare dispute

Ha’aretz has reported that rail workers have declared an official dispute, claiming a new route from Rishon Letzion to Tel Aviv will increase workloads. The route is due to open on September 25.

An agreement between management and union meant workers were prevented from officially taking industrial action all summer, under the auspices of the Labour Court.

Kenyan shoe workers resume strike

Around 500 workers at the Bata Shoe Company went on strike this week, their second strike within two weeks. On the first day of the strike, the workers picketed the factory to persuade the afternoon shift to join the strike.

Their previous strike was in opposition to the low levels of piecework they receive. The strike resumed following management’s refusal to address their demands. They are also opposing the introduction of a duty roster.

The workers accuse the company of outsourcing to contractors to drive down labour costs. Speaking to the *Nairobi Star* one explained, “By so doing, workers end up being paid peanuts, which cannot meet our basic needs.”

Nigerian water workers strike

Water workers in Lagos state employed by the Lagos State Water Corporation went on strike Tuesday. They are protesting management’s refusal to address their complaints of poor conditions of service. Through the Amalgamated Union of Public Corporation, Civil Service Technical and Recreational Services Employees (AUPCTRE), they submitted proposals for improvements to their conditions three years ago, but received no response from management.

The action led to the closing of the Ijora water works and the union general secretary said unless management responded all the state’s water works would be closed.

Namibian uranium miners set to strike

Around 900 miners at the Rio Tinto Rossing uranium mine voted overwhelmingly to strike Friday, in pursuit of bonus payments in line with those paid to management. They are seeking an additional N\$30,000 (US\$3,900) on top of the current bonus payment of N\$11,000

(US\$1,400). The majority of miners are represented by the Mineworkers Union of Namibia.

The union announced it will hold further talks with management to try to avoid the strike. It added that the company had filed court papers to have the proposed strike declared illegal.

Nigeria: Strikes in pursuit of minimum wage

Hospital workers and bank workers in Kaduna state began an indefinite strike Monday over the state government's refusal to implement the minimum wage legislation passed by central government.

Kaduna state government met with Nigerian Labour Congress (NLC) and Trade Union Congress (TUC) officials in an attempt to end the strike.

The indefinite strike by civil servants in Anambra state, demanding the state government implement the minimum wage, will enter its second week this week.

Anambra state governor Peter Obi has threatened to sack 3,000 civil servants, including teachers, and put on hold the planned employment of a further 1,000 civil servants. He claimed the state could not afford to implement the central government minimum wage.

Workers aligned with the NLC in Katsina state are continuing their strike. While the state government has agreed to implement the minimum wage, workers are in dispute with the state government over wage differentials following increases in line with the minimum wage to the lowest paid workers.

Swaziland public transport strike

Around 1,500 striking bus workers, including Local Kombis Association members who run the widely prevalent private mini buses, went on strike and held a march in Manzini on Monday. Manzini is Swaziland's largest urban centre.

They were protesting the large fines being imposed for traffic offences. The cash-strapped kingdom of Swaziland has been using fines to supplement its income.

The march was attacked by police, who fired on three marchers. Some reports say this resulted in deaths, but this has yet to be confirmed.



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